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Reginald Martinez Jackson

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He has been called, Mr. October, The Ultimate Hot Dog, Reg-a-roo, a shoo-in for the Ego Hall of Fame, and Regg-ie, Regg-ie. But my favorite has always been the self-proclaimed, "Straw that Stirs the Drink." Reginald Martinez Jackson. Born May 18, 1946, in Wyncote, Pennsylvania, could stir the drink like few in the History of Baseball.

On Sunday he will be inducted into Baseball's Hall of Fame in Cooperstown and join baseball's immortals. And well he should. Reggie Jackson was one of the most colorful, controversial, and best players of his time. The numbers for Jackson are impressive, but they tell only part of the story of the man who came to New York and predicted he would have a candy bar named after him. And did. The Reggie bar.

Reggie Jackson led the American League in runs scored twice, in home runs four times, in rbi's once, in slugging percentage three times. In 21 seasons he hit 563 career homers (sixth all-time), 2584 hits, and drove in 1702 runs. In the World Series he hit .357, 9th all-time; and had a slugging percentage of .755, the best of all time. In the twelve years from 1971 to 1982 his teams won ten divisional titles, and five world championships. He was a member of The Sporting News American League all-star team five times. He struck out more than any man in history, 2,597 and like Ruth his strike outs were almost as exciting as his homers.

Jackson's career began with the Kansas City/Oakland Athletics for nine seasons, was in Baltimore for one year, had five years with the Yankees, five years as a California Angel, and spent his final season back in Oakland. His most productive and controversial years were in Oakland where he did battle with Charles O. Finley, and in New York where he was one-third of the Bermuda ego triangle with Billy Martin and George Steinbrenner.

Jackson's years with the Athletics were the high point of A's baseball, as they won three consecutive World Series in 1972, '73, and '74, establishing themselves as one of the greatest teams in the History of Baseball. Jackson was voted MVP in 1973, and MVP in the 1973 World Series. In 1974 he made the cover of Time magazine.

He was a proud and defiant black man at a time when that was still very difficult for the white sportswriters and fans to

take. Reggie seemed to have a chip on his shoulders at times, and then could turn around and be disarmingly modest and charming.

I remember several special moments in Reggie's career. The first and perhaps most vivid from the 1971 All-Star Game in Detroit when Reggie hit one of the longest and hardest hit home runs I have ever seen. It hit about half way up the light-standard in right center field and would have easily cleared the roof at Tiger Stadium. It took the air out of the stadium that night, and I must say I was awe struck last summer when I visited Tiger Stadium for the first time, and from behind home plate was able to see what a prodigious shot it was.

I also remember another of Reggie's homers. This one in Minneapolis at the old Metropolitan Stadium. It was a comparable shot which hit the top of the scoreboard in right-center field on the Grain Belt Beer sign, about the same distance as the homer in Detroit. I can remember only a few players ever hitting that scoreboard, and then only near the bottom of it.

There was the drama of the 1978 World Series. In Game Two Jackson was struck out by Bob Welch of the Dodgers with two out in the ninth and Jackson the potential winning run. Then there was Reggie the crafty winner, who in sixth inning of game four of the same World Series kept a rally going by getting hit by a double play relay throw back to first from Bill Russell. Jackson got the back of his knee in front of the ball as he froze in his tracks a few feet off first. It was a master move, that drove the Dodgers to distraction, and allowed a run to score.

And then there was the 1977 World Series with three home runs by Jackson on three pitches in the final game, the third one producing the chant of REGGIE, REGGIE, REGGIE as he majestically circled the bases. He obliterated several World Series hitting records. It was that same year that Billy and Reggie got into a fight in the dugout which was captured on national television. The following season opened with a home run at Yankee Stadium and a rain of Reggie bars coming out of the stands, as the candy bar made its debut.

And finally I remember the only time I saw him in person. It was late in his career when he was with the California Angels. I was in Baltimore to see a game, and suddenly the crowd stirred, and a buzz swept across the stadium. I couldn't figure out what was happening until I saw the straw stirring the drink. Reggie Jackson had come out of the dugout to the on-deck circle.

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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